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# Bare and indefinite NPs in predicative position in French\*

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This paper proposes a new analysis of the use of bare nouns vs. indefinite NPs in predicative position in French. We distinguish between predicational sentences (with the bare noun version) and equative sentences (with the indefinite version). We argue that bare nouns ascribe permanent properties to *aspects* of entities. As for the indefinites, we claim that they exhibit their specific reading and introduce an individual *in a new situation*, which is identified with the referent of the subject.

## 1. Introduction

It is well-known that determiners in Romance languages<sup>1</sup> are not mandatory for NPs in predicative position.

- (1) a. Jean est un enfant  
Jean is a child  
b. Jean est enfant  
Jean is Ø child  
c. Moi, je suis voiture/ salade/ mini-jupe ...  
Me, I am Ø car/ salad/ mini-skirt ...  
'Me, I like/drive/sell... cars/ like/eat/buy... salads/ like/wear/sell... mini-skirts ...'

Recent research on the subject has considered in particular what have been called 'capacity nouns' like *avocat* 'lawyer' (de Swart *et al.* 2007), that is to say, nouns which have the +[*sentient*] and +[*institutional*] features.

This paper looks beyond these restrictions, since, as the examples in (1) suggest, other nouns which do not have these two features behave in the same way<sup>2</sup>. These features seem unnecessary and we argue that any noun can be used.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper focuses on French. The observations and theory extend to Italian. The corresponding translations of (1) are: (a) Giovanni è un bambino, (b) Giovanni è bambino (c) (Io,) sono insalata.

<sup>2</sup> van Peteghem 1993 and Roy 2006 already emphasize that 'enfant' (1b) is acceptable even if lacking the +[*institutional*] feature.

The paper is dedicated to spelling out the conditions of their use under the two variants.

One of our claims is that the two variants correspond to two types of sentences, predication (with the bare variant) and equatives (with the indefinite). In the first case, the bare noun is of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$  and ascribes a property to an *aspect* of an individual; in the second case, *un N*, of type  $\langle e \rangle$ , singles out an individual  $x$  which bears the description  $N$  in a *new situation*. We argue that sentences of the type *Jean est N* are predication (but ascribe properties to *tropes*), whereas sentences of the type *Jean est un N* are equatives. This will allow us to explain why the indefinite version is the marked one out of context (since equatives often require a special context to be uttered felicitously, cf. Zamparelli 2000, Mikkelsen 2002). It also explains why the indefinite version of (1c) provided in (1c') is pragmatically weird, since it would equate a person and a car, a salad or a mini-skirt. Only special contexts can make it felicitous and it is part of our endeavour to spell out which ones and the mechanisms of interpretation.

- (1) c'. #Je suis une salade !  
I am a salad!

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we review the main pieces of data and available accounts. In section 3, we present our proposal. We dedicate section 3.1 to bare nouns, and section 3.2 to indefinite NPs. Section 4 concludes the paper.

## 2. The first pieces of the problem: previous accounts and data

A first idea (Strohmeier 1907, Kupferman 1979) on the difference between the bare and the indefinite version is that *un N* describes an individual bearing the property introduced by the noun, whereas the bare version is a case of property attribution.

This view has been elaborated recently by Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005 in a modified claim which keeps the original distinction between two kinds of predication. Specifically, the relation between the bare and the indefinite one in predicative position has been analyzed as a relation between attributive predication (for the bare version) versus inclusion/classification (for the indefinite version).

More technically, the claim goes as follows. *Un enfant* and  $\emptyset$  *enfant* are of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ . Although they both are one place predicates, they still differ in that  $\emptyset$  *enfant* is considered a 'qua-property' predicate, whereas *un enfant* is defined as a 'qua-set' predicate. This difference has a consequence in their treatment of the subject NP. When combined with *un N*, the subject is assigned the type  $\langle e \rangle$ . It

denotes an entity which belongs to the set  $\langle e, t \rangle$  denoted by *un N* (the reduction is  $\langle e \rangle * \langle e, t \rangle = t$ ). When combined with  $\emptyset$  *enfant*, the subject is taken to be a generalized quantifier of the type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$  (the reduction is  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle * \langle e, t \rangle$ ). In this case, the authors claim that the bare noun introduces a property localized in the subject. In other words, the sentence says that the property introduced by the bare noun is one among those of the subject NP.

This view is summarized in (3a) and (3b) for (2a) and (2b), respectively, where  $D$  and  $P$  stand for properties,  $x$  is a variable with ranges over individuals, and  $j$  is an individual constant. (2a) states that *lawyer* is one of the properties of John, while (2b) states that John is a member of the set of lawyers.

- (2) a. Jean est avocat  
Jean is  $\emptyset$  lawyer  
b. ?<sup>3</sup> Jean est un avocat  
Jean is a lawyer
- (3) a.  $(D \in \lambda P.P(j))$  – The property of being a lawyer is one among the properties of John  
b.  $j \in \lambda x D(x)$  – John is an individual in the set of lawyers

According to Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade, this explains the *ce/il* distribution. Assuming the view according to which *ce* cannot be shifted to denote properties and thus can only be of type  $\langle e \rangle$ , the following contrast seems to be explained:

- (4) a. Pierre, il est médecin  
Pierre, he is  $\emptyset$  doctor  
b. Pierre, c'est un médecin  
Pierre, 'ce' is a doctor

This view poses both empirical and theoretical problems.

### 2.1.1 Empirical problems

The empirical adequacy of the distinction is far from clear. It has been noted since Strohmeyer 1907 that the indefinite article introduces a shift in the interpretation. Besides the classificatory use, which seems to be correctly analyzed and illustrated in (5), the indefinite is very commonly used in “metaphorical contexts”, cf. (6), or when the speaker intends to emphasize the “quality” expressed by the noun, cf. (7). This use has been called ‘evaluative’ (van Peteghem 1993).

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<sup>3</sup> ‘?’ is meant to indicate that this example is not always perfect out of the blue. We will come back to this issue in section 3.3.2.

- (5) L'autruche est un oiseau  
The ostrich is a bird
- (6) Le castor est un architecte  
The beaver is an architect
- (7) Jean est un avocat !  
John is a lawyer!

Since the above mentioned account takes for granted that *être un N* expresses set membership, four points remain unexplained.

1. Remarkably, the only use that is correctly grasped by the above mentioned analyses does not alternate with the bare version (van Peteghem 1993).

- (8) #L'autruche est oiseau  
The ostrich is Ø bird

2. (7) is not properly captured and the reasons for 'emphasizing the quality' deserve further investigation.

3. Similarly, the above-mentioned account is also silent on the fact that the *un N* is much better accepted when it is modified.

- (9) ?Jean est un avocat  
Jean is a lawyer
- (10) Jean est un avocat qui travaille dans le troisième arrondissement  
Jean is a penal who works in the 13th urban district

4. What has been called the "metaphorical" use is far from rare. In that case, no adjective is required to have an acceptable sentence.

- (11) Jean est un manager  
Jean is a manager
- (12) Jean est manager  
Jean is Ø manager

(11) can be used to metaphorically qualify the behaviour of John, whereas (12) entails that John is manager by profession (see de Swart *et al.* 2007).

### 2.1.2 Theoretical problems

On the theoretical side, there are also some issues that need further investigation.

Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005 argue that the indefinite and the bare version predicate in two different ways: attributive predication (the bare version) and ascribing set membership (the indefinite one).

Two questions arise: Should we unify the two? And should we explicitly introduce type shifting for the use of *un*?

Recent work by de Swart *et al.* 2007 positively answers both these questions and adopts a unitary view of predication as expression of set membership/classification.

The authors claim that (2b) – which they accept as perfectly well-formed without any special context– expresses that ‘John is a member of the lawyer kind’, where the capacity noun *avocat* of type *e* is coerced into a kind (also of type *e*) and then into a set expression via application of REL (Carlson, 1977) inducing type shifting from kinds to entities, and which semantically corresponds to *un*.

For (2a), they adopt a (c)overt operator CAP, obtaining ( $j \in \text{CAP}(\text{teacher})$ ), i.e. ‘John is in the set of entities which are lawyers by profession’. This is meant to capture sentence (13a). ‘By profession’ further turns ‘lawyer’ into the set of elements that are lawyers by profession, the sentence stating that John is one of them, cf. (13b).

- (13) a. John is a lawyer by profession
- b. John is in the set of professional lawyers

This view introduces some new theoretical advances. In particular, it assumes that some hidden material plays a role, providing the ‘domain’ of application of the property. Nonetheless, some theoretical problems remain.

The first one concerns the identification of features characterizing the nouns that can appear in the bare position. These authors adopt the features [+*sentient*], [+*scalar*] (from Matushansky and Spector 2005) and add the feature [+*institutional*]. This wrongly excludes nouns expressing age, sex, and different kinds of qualities from the pattern (see Strohmeyer, 1907; van Peteghem, 1993; Roy 2006), as well as nouns like *voiture* ‘car’, cf. (1c).

- (14) a. Jean est enfant  
          Jean is  $\emptyset$  child
  - b. Jean est un enfant  
          John is a child
- (15) a. Jeanne est garçon  
          Jeanne is  $\emptyset$  boy

- b. Jeanne est un garçon !  
Jeanne is a boy!

The second one concerns the characterization of the kinds of descriptions being made, whether they have a more permanent/definitional or a temporary flavour. De Swart *et al.*'s account is silent on this issue, which is at the core of the problem.

Other authors (notably Matushansky and Spector 2005, following Roy 2001) have claimed that the indefinite version would express a definitory property, and the bare version a temporary one<sup>4</sup>. This is supposed to explain (16).

- (16) Jean est danseur la nuit et enseignant le jour  
John is Ø dancer during the night and Ø teacher during the day

Let us note from the outset that this characterization is questionable. If it can rule out (8), it does not explain how (6) can be obtained. Furthermore, it is not so clear that (16) expresses a non-permanent property (see below).

Let us summarize and take stock. Like Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, we assume that the bare noun is of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , but claim that the indefinite NP is of type  $\langle e \rangle$ . We are going to propose a different view (i) of the entity that is being described by the bare nouns, (ii) the constraints regulating the use of the indefinite, in particular (iii) provide a different account of the role of the copula and giving importance to a general requirement of the use of indefinites, namely, novelty and situational anchoring. Although proposing a different account from de Swart *et al.* 2007, we are going to build on an important insight of theirs, namely, that recovered material plays a role. Finally, like Matushansky and Spector 2005, we acknowledge the need of the scalar feature, but we do not assume as they do that it is compulsory and explain under which conditions the scalar interpretation of the noun is forced. Moreover, differently from these authors, we argue that *un N* introduces a temporary, situated property, whereas bare nouns a definitory property of aspects of individuals.

### 3. A new proposal

#### 3.1 Overview of the claim

The claim we argue for in the following sections is that the bare noun ascribes a property to an aspect of an individual, whereas the indefinite NP introduces an individual in a new situation.

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<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Beyssade 2008 suggests in a recent work that the bare noun expresses a temporary phase, see below.

The two variants correlate with two different types of sentences: predicative sentences and equative ones.

### **3.2. Analysis for the bare version**

In this section, we develop the proposal that bare nouns express permanent properties of aspects of individuals and like any other individual-level predication, lead to a generic reading of sentences (see Chierchia 1995).

In section 3.2.1, we begin by providing some arguments for considering the presence of reconstructed material (following in part de Swart *et al. ibid*). We present in section 3.2.2 an informal view of aspects as tropes, followed by a more formal analysis of ‘NP est N’ and some predictions. We argue in section 3.2.3 in favour of treating bare nouns as expressing permanent properties of tropes, which leads to generic readings.

#### **3.2.1 First steps**

The first urgent question to be addressed is whether it is actually the case that ‘some but not all’ nouns can function as bare predicates. The discussion in the following sections shows that this view is incorrect. Any noun can be used bare iff (i) it provides information which is not previously given by the subject and (ii) if an argument introducing a domain of application of the property denoted by the bare noun can be recovered<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A related construction in Italian sheds some light on the phenomenon at hand. The same set of nouns that can occupy the predicative position bare are also possible in the construction *faire il N* ‘to do the’ as firstly noted by Renzi and Venelli 1975.

- (i) a. Giovanni *fà* il bambino  
Giovanni does the little boy
- b. Giovanni *fà* il poliziotto  
Giovanni does the policeman
- c. Giovanni *fà* la femmina / *c’* ? il maschio  
Giovanni does the girl / ? the boy
- d. Marta *fà* la mamma  
Marta does the mummy

In all these cases, ‘*fà il*’ can be paraphrased as ‘plays/has the role/profession/behaves like’. (ii) presents the paraphrases of (i).

- (ii) a. Giovanni *si comporta come* un bambino  
Giovanni behaves like a child
- b. Giovanni *fà il mestiere di* poliziotto  
Giovanni does the job of policeman
- c. Giovanni *si comporta come* una femmina  
Giovanni behaves like a girl
- d. Marta *prende il ruolo della* mamma



It has recently been proposed that only sortal nouns expressing (temporary) phases of an individual like *enfant* ‘child’ can function as a bare predicate (Beyssade 2008). This seems to explain the unacceptability of (17), since *garçon* ‘boy’ is generally true of an individual all his life long. However, *garçon* can indeed function as a bare predicate, as illustrated by the acceptability of the attested example (18a). Similarly, (18b) is perfect, still *hermaphrodite* expresses a non-temporary property.

- (17) #Jean est garçon  
Jean is Ø boy

- (18) a. Quand on est garçon, on aime bien les garçons. Pour discuter, faire copain (Internet)  
When one is Ø boy, one likes boy. To discuss, make friends  
b. Jean est hermaphrodite  
Jean is Ø hermaphrodite

Below, we show that these examples as well as others empirically illustrate our two claims, namely, that the bare noun (i) must give a new information with regard to the subject to be acceptable and (ii) describe an aspect of an individual.

### (i) Bringing in new information

The contrast between (17) and (18a)-(18b) straightforwardly derives from our first claim. In (17), the proper noun *Jean* already indicates that the referent is a boy, the bare noun is unacceptable because it only provides redundant information. By contrast, the pronoun *on* being underspecified with regard to sex, *garçon* conveys new and relevant information. Similarly, (18b) is acceptable because the property of being an hermaphrodite is not already provided by the proper noun *Jean*. Let us now consider the following cases (note that (19a) is interpreted as ‘Jeanne behaves like a boy’ and (19b) is interpreted as Jeanne behaves a lot like a woman).

- (19) a. Jean/Jeanne est garçon (de caractère/comportement)  
Jean/Jeanne is Ø boy  
b. Jeanne est (très) femme  
Jeanne is (very) woman

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Marta plays the role of the mother (she has become a mother)

For sake of precision, let us emphasize that the ‘fa il + N’ in Italian is not a paraphrase of the bare version in predicative position. But it sheds some light on the construction we are interested in here, since (a) there is an overlap between the nouns that can appear in the ‘fa il’ construction and bare in predicative positions; and (b) it also relies on reconstruction of hidden material.

- c. Jean est policier  
Jean is Ø policeman

When used to express the behavior of the individual, nouns like *garçon* again provide information which is not already conveyed by the subject, hence the acceptability of (19a). In (19b), *très* ('very'; see Kennedy and McNally 2005) has the effect of shifting a non-gradable predicate into a gradable one, and expresses that the property is verified to a high degree. Stating that Jeanne is 'très femme' cannot amount to state that she is a woman (a non-gradable property); as a consequence, no redundancy occurs between the subject and the bare predicate. However, the bare noun does not always have to be interpreted as a gradable predicate for the bare predication to be relevant; for instance, *policier* is certainly not necessarily interpreted as gradable in (19c). We thus disagree with Matushansky and Spector 2005, which states that the construction makes the gradable feature compulsory.

The unacceptability of (8) is also easily derived the same way: the information of being a bird is already brought in by *ostrich*. The only way to save the example is to reinterpret *oiseau* as denoting the (accidental) behaviour, role, etc. of birds. On the other hand, the indefinite version of (6) (given in (20)) is fine, since being an architect characterizes the behaviour of the beaver (e.g. his skills):

- (20) Le castor est architecte.  
The beaver is Ø architect

## **(ii) Aspects**

What crucially counts for the use of the bare version is that there is an aspect of which the property is predicated. The information is thus 'partial' not because it only applies for a limited time, but because it concerns an aspect of the entity.

Like de Swart *et al.* 2007, we assume that some hidden material plays a role and agree that sentences like (21) state that the *nationality* of the individual at hand is Italian. However, according to our proposal, the task of this hidden material is not to shift the type of the nouns (*à la de Swart et al.*), but to provide the aspect of which the property is predicated.

- (21) Il est Italien  
He is Ø Italian

Our claim is then that bare nouns are predicates of aspects of individuals (nationality being one example of them, see below). The generalization we propose is given in (22).

- (22) Generalization. When nouns are used bare in predicative position, a (possibly implicit) *par/de/dans* NP2 provides the trope to which the property introduced by the bare noun applies. If NP2 denotes such a trope, the bare noun predication of the type ‘NP1 est N *par/de/dans* NP2’ semantically amounts to a predication of the type ‘NP2 de NP1 est N’.

The generalization (22) extends that of de Swart *et al.* 2007 in that it does not restrict the set of nouns by the +[*institutional*] feature, but allows any noun expressing a property that can be restricted by a *de/par/dans* modifier denoting a trope of the subject, that is virtually every noun. Some predictions derived from (22) are provided in the next section.

In the same vein, the account extends the coverage well beyond the +[*scalar*] and +[*sentient*] as proposed by Matushansky and Spector. Productive examples such as those cited in (1c) are captured as acceptable. Our analysis is given in the next section.

### 3.2.2 Aspects as tropes and tropes as accidents

Recent debate in the philosophical and linguistic literature has understood aspects in various ways. One of the views, which traces back to Aristotle, *Category I*, treats aspects of individuals as particulars, which ontologically depend on that individual. ‘The character of John’, the ‘nationality of John’ and so on are examples of them. There are some points of disagreement about which individuals count as tropes. Some theoreticians consider that tropes are abstract (e.g. Campbell, 1990), others define them as concrete individuals (e.g. Simons, 1994). All seem to agree on two issues:

- (i) Tropes are *dependent* particulars, in the sense that they ontologically depend on another individual. So are accidents *à la* Aristotle.
- (ii) Eventualities are tropes (eventualities cannot exist without their participants to exist).

Since eventualities have already a name in linguistics, we will restrict here the use of the term ‘trope’ to denote, within the class of dependent particulars, the complement set of the set of eventualities. In other words, ‘tropes’ will be used to denote dependent particulars which are not eventualities. We do not commit as to whether they are abstract or concrete.

We suggest that predication with bare nouns amounts to property ascription to tropes under this definition; the bare noun is of type <e,t> and ascribes a property to a trope. Following (22), sentences (23a-24a) paraphrase as (23b-24b).

- (23) a. John est avocat  
John is  $\emptyset$  lawyer  
b. La profession de John est avocat  
The profession of John is  $\emptyset$  lawyer
- (24) a. Jean est italien  
Jean is  $\emptyset$  Italian  
b. La nationalité de Jean est italienne  
The nationality of John is Italian

In (23), *avocat* bears the type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , the copula has no effect, and being a particularized individual, ‘the profession of John’ bears the type  $\langle e \rangle$ .

Differently from what is stated in Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, individuals are not analyzed here as properties of properties among which that expressed by the bare noun. The account we propose keeps the representation of individuals uniform, namely of type  $\langle e \rangle$  (see section that follows for the analysis of the indefinite version). The cost of this claim is, of course, that we have to accommodate covert material, and coerce “Jean” into “a ‘trope’ of Jean”. The bare noun characterizes this particular (also of type  $\langle e \rangle$ ). However, we agree with Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin that the bare version ascribes a property and does not express set membership.

Like de Swart *et al.* 2007, we assume that (23) implicates that John is among the lawyers by profession, but this is not the primary meaning of the sentence: it firstly qualifies its profession (not John). Moreover, although our analysis requires some hidden material like theirs, it does not involve type shifting, but only that hidden material be accommodated in subject position. Finally, it also has the advantage of covering a larger set of data, without a restriction to  $+[institutional]$  nouns. Before deriving its predictions, we present our analysis more formally.

As often emphasized by trope theorists, there is no closed set of particulars to be attributed to an individual.

Let  $I$  be the set of individuals,  $X$  the set of tropes and ‘of’ the abstract part of relation. (25) states that for every individual, the set of its tropes is not empty. (26) presents the semantics for the interpretation of predicative sentences with bare nouns.

(25)  $\forall Y \in X \ \forall i \in I (\exists y \in (Y \text{ of } i))$

(26) The semantics of the bare version:  $NP \text{ is } N \text{ iff } \lambda P. \lambda y (P(y))$

A first prediction of the analysis is that NPs like *la profession de Pierre* 'the profession of Pierre' which 'openly' denote tropes are acceptable with the bare noun version, but not with the indefinite one, cf. (23b) versus (23c). Note that (23c) funnily suggests that the trope of Pierre is a 'real' individual ("shall we invite the profession of Pierre for dinner today?"), which is explained if, as we propose below, the indefinite version introduces an individual and equates it with the referent of the subject:

- (23) b. OK *La profession de Pierre est avocat.*  
The profession of Pierre is Ø lawyer
- (23) c. # *La profession de Pierre est un avocat.*  
The profession of Pierre is a lawyer

Note that contrary to what happens in "classical" cases of coercion (*John begins the book / John begins reading the book*), the version explicitly giving the output of the coercion process (that is, the paraphrase with a subject overtly denoting a trope) might sometimes sound somewhat unnatural. But we believe that if this is the case, it is due to the fact that we are not as used to talk overtly about tropes as we are about persons, things or events. A common strategy is to use nouns like *Jean* to describe a trope of Jean, as everybody understands the speaker's intention.

A second prediction is that the kind of paraphrase illustrated in (23a)-(23b) is *not* available when the *de/dans/par* modifier does not denote a trope of the subject. For instance, (27b) – which is unacceptable -- does not paraphrase (27a), because *la naissance de Pierre* 'the birth of Pierre' does not express a trope of Pierre, but rather an event involving him. Similarly, (28a) is not equivalent to (28b), because *la mère de Pierre* does not denote a trope of Jean, but rather an individual linked to him:

- (27) a. *Pierre est italien de naissance.*  
Pierre is Italian by birth
- b. #*La naissance de Pierre est italienne*  
The birth of Pierre is Italian
- (28) a. *Jean est aveugle par sa mère.*  
Jean is blind because of his mother
- b. *La mère de Jean est aveugle.*  
Jean's mother is blind

### 3.2.3 The bare noun ascribes generic properties

Authors agree on some facts about the phenomenology of generic properties: (i) they do not need to be instantiated, cf. (29a); (ii) they can be bound in time, cf.

(29b). Overall, definitory properties are taken to introduce a generic operator GEN and give rise to a generic interpretation of sentences.

- (29) a. This machine crushes oranges.  
b. When he was a little boy, my son was very talkative

These two characteristics are met by bare noun predication. Contra Roy 2006, we assume that (30a) is perfectly acceptable (as well as its indefinite version). Note that (30b) is used to mean that my daughter used to wear mini-skirts when she was a teenager.

- (30) a. Pierre est avocat mais il n'a jamais pratiqué  
Pierre is Ø lawyer, but he never practised.  
b. Quand elle était adolescente, ma fille était mini-jupe  
When she was a teenager, my daughter was Ø mini-skirt

(31) has been frequently used to argue that bare nouns introduce temporary properties. This interpretation of the data does not seem to be correct. If John smokes after dinner, he is not said to have a temporary property, but a property that occurs at particular occasions. In other words, as often argued, the generic reading is obtained in these cases and is driven by quantifying over situations (the days and the nights) and not over individuals (Krifka 1995, a.o.).

- (31) Jean est danseur la nuit et enseignant le jour (= (16))  
John is Ø dancer during the night and Ø teacher during the day

Thirdly, bare nouns are not accepted in real episodic sentences. For instance, (32) is acceptable only on its inchoative reading under which it expresses the beginning of a permanent property.

- (32) #This morning, Pierre est avocat.  
This morning, Pierre is Ø lawyer

On the contrary, the indefinite version of (32) is acceptable under the metaphorical reading (Pierre is behaving this morning like a lawyer).

Summarizing. We have endorsed the claim that bare nouns lead to predication sentences. We have shown that (1) some hidden material must be recovered, but that this does not introduce any type shifting, (2) the predication is 'partial' in that it concerns an aspect, (3) the predication is not temporary and leads to generic reading. Related to this third claim, we have shown that (3') any noun can be used, provided it brings in new information that is attached to an aspect of an individual.

In the next section we consider the conditions of use of the indefinite version, and also come back to a comparison with the use of the bare one.

### 3.3 The conditions of use of the indefinite version

#### 3.3.1 The claim

We claim that in predicative position, *un N* denotes an individual (is of type  $\langle e \rangle$ ) and argue for two points.

**(i) Situational dependence of *un N*.** Firstly, we claim that to be appropriate, the indefinite *un N* receives its specific reading and singularizes an individual  $x$  under the guise  $N$  in a *new situation*.

- (33) **Situational dependence of *Un N*:** *un N* denotes an individual under the property  $N$  felicitously iff there is an element in the sentence anchoring the individual  $x$  and the property  $N$  in a new situation  $s$ .

Basically, in saying that *un N* denotes an individual  $x$  in a new situation  $s$ , (33) only reformulates the Condition of Novelty traditionally attached to indefinites since Heim 1982.

On the other hand, the claim that the attribution of the property  $N$  denoted by the noun is also anchored in a situation is maybe less traditional. It amounts to saying that the individual only has to verify the property  $N$  in  $s$  in order for the predication to be fulfilled. The predication provided by *un N* is in this sense “temporally weak”. However, this of course does not impede one from using *un N* to make a stronger claim. The point is that it is not made compulsory by *un N* itself.

In claiming that *un* is also attached to the Condition of Novelty in the position under study, we offer a more unitary view of this indefinite. We are also in line with numerous studies having assumed that anchoring in a particular situation is a general requirement for the existential *un/des*. For instance, Dobrovie-Sorin 1997 claimed that *un/des* require “presentational predicates” to be acceptable in subject and object position.

**(ii) Equative sentences.** Secondly, while Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin assume like other authors that sentences of the type “NP est un N” are predicational, we suggest below that these sentences are true equatives, and as such assert the identity between the denotation of the subject and the denotation of the post-copular NP. *Mary is Dr Smith* is a paradigmatical example of equative sentences

making an identity statement.<sup>6</sup> Among authors recognizing the existence of true equative copular sentences, some of them (e.g. Heycock and Kroch, 1997) keep the semantics of the copula uniform and assign different types of small clauses to predicational and equative copular sentences. Others capture the difference in positing an ambiguous copula, the equative sentences being built with a ‘BE of identity’. This is the option taken by Heller 1999, who provides empirical evidence in Hebrew for positing two different *be*. Here, we will also derive equation semantics by using a *be* of identity, but we believe that our account could also be translated in an account *à la* Heycock and Kroch, where the copula is taken to be unambiguous.

In sum, sentences like “NP est un N” are analysed here as asserting the identity between two individuals, the second one being anchored in a particular situation. (34) summarizes this view ( $N_{in\ s}$  symbolises the property *N* relativised to the situation *s*). The specific reading of the indefinite is translated with the help of choice functions. Let us *f* be a choice function (among others):

- (34) a. Le boulanger est un manager !  
The baker is a manager!  
b. [The baker]:  $\iota x \text{ Baker}(x)$   
c. [be]: ‘=’  
d. [a manager]:  $f(\text{Manager}_{in\ s})$   
e. [The baker is a manager] =  $\iota x \text{ Baker}(x) = f(\text{Manager}_{in\ s})$

It is worth noting that in English, due to the lack of a/bare alternation in predicative position, sentences like *John is a teacher* (in English!) have been generally classified as predicational. Our (maybe somewhat provocative) claim is that in French, the two variants correspond to predicative sentences (variants selected with bare nouns) and equative ones, the latter being selected with the indefinite version.

Besides the number of predictions that this analysis derives despite its apparent unorthodox character, one of the arguments for adopting the equative analysis comes from the impossibility of having the pronouns *il/elle* ‘he/she’ in the subject position, a robust fact which has often been acknowledged in previous literature (Kupferman 1979; Laca and Tasmowski, 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin and Beyssade 2005 a.o.). Generally, this fact is explained with the generalization that *ce* is specialized for expressing set membership<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Following e.g. Higgins 1973, we discriminate between true equative sentences (or identity sentences) and specificational ones. One argument in favor of maintaining the difference is that the subject of the first is referential, while the one of the latter is non-referential (see e.g. Mikkelsen 2002). On the contrary, Heycock and Kroch consider that equative sentences are specificational.

<sup>7</sup> Recall that most of these theories consider that *un NP* leads to classificatory predication.



- (35) #Il est un médecin  
He is a doctor

We suggest that the problem of (35) comes from a pragmatic constraint we propose to attach to equative sentences, namely that the discourse referents of the two identified NPs must roughly have the same “discursive weight”. In the canonical true equative sentences (*Mary is Doctor Smith*), they are supposed to be both known to the hearer (Zamparelli 2000). In the sentences under study here, they both must introduce a new individual. Being an anaphorical pronoun, *il* is ‘discursively too heavy’ for its discourse referent to be equate with the one of the indefinite in an equative sentence. Remarkably, as we will see below, other pronouns like *je* ‘I’ and *tu* ‘you’ are perfectly acceptable in sentences like (35), which is unsurprising given our claim: since they are deictic pronouns, they can introduce new individuals in the discourse and have the same discursive weight as indefinites.

Before showing how the analysis accounts for the distribution of the indefinite in predicative position and the differences with the corresponding bare noun version (section 3.3.4), we review the main interpretations attributed to predicative sentences built with *un N* (section 3.3.2), and show that the contrast we assume between *N* and *un N* is independently displayed in other constructions (section 3.3.3).

### 3.3.2 Two different interpretations

A sentence like (36) has been said to make two different kinds of ascriptions.

- (36) Pierre est un enseignant  
Pierre is a teacher

Under the first reading, (36) is said to make an ‘identificational statement’ (Van Peteghem 1993, Roy 2006): it identifies an individual, typically as an answer to a *wh*-question: *qui est Pierre?* (*Who is Peter?*). Identificational statements are felt as expressing definitory properties. If one presents Peter as a teacher, it means that Peter is a teacher. Note that equative sentences are precisely supposed to make ‘identificational statements’.

Under the second reading, corresponding to the ‘metaphorical reading’ or to the ‘evaluative’ one, (36) attributes what is considered to be a temporary property (Strohmeier 1907, Van Peteghem 1993). (36) can then be used in a context where Pierre is behaving *on one occasion* like a teacher but is not one by profession. This is also the kind of metaphorical reading that makes sentences like (1c’) felicitous.

These two readings have either been treated apart or the second have been reduced to the first. Some authors (e.g. Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005) have in fact argued that the first reading corresponds to (i) the expression of set membership and (ii) to the ascription of a definitory property. They have treated the second set of readings (metaphorical and evaluative) as marginal. Other authors have stated that the *un N* expresses set membership under no matter which of these two readings (e.g. de Swart *et al.* 2007). In what follows, we argue that the metaphorical and evaluative readings are to be taken seriously and propose a unitary view of the identificational and metaphorical/evaluative interpretations.

Before going to the theoretical side, it might be useful to come back to the empirical description of these two interpretations, which is to our view not entirely complete. Firstly, it has been left unnoticed that a sentence like (36) is the *marked* one compared to its bare version. In fact, native subjects are often reluctant to attribute themselves (36) out of the blue. This dispreference is left unexplained by previous accounts. On the contrary, it is expected if these sentences are equative ones, since equatives often require a special context to be uttered felicitously (cf. Zamparelli 2000, Mikkelsen 2002). Another important fact which deserves more attention is that it is not true that (36) is felt as acceptable in *any* description of a definitory property. What is crucial is precisely filled (although accidentally) by the *who*-test, namely that the (identificational) statement is a *presentational* one: the individual is introduced *for the first time* under the guise offered by the noun *in a specific situation*. This is very often this kind of presentational contexts that native speakers evoke to make a sentence like (36) perfectly natural. Another context often evoked is a “justificational” one, where, typically, the speaker feels obliged to reintroduce himself under the relevant guise to the addressee which acts as if he ignores it (*Dites! Je suis un enseignant moi chère amie!* ‘What do you think?! I’m a teacher, dear friend!’). Crucially again, this context anchors the predication in a particular situation, and presents the individual as newly introduced under this guise (since the hearer feigns to ignore it).

We claim that the two acknowledged readings correspond to two different ways to satisfy the situation dependence of *un N* (cf. (33)): in the presentational reading, the presentational game provides the needed situation (*x* is equated with *y* in a particular situation, namely the presentation), and in the metaphorical or evaluative reading, it is provided by the behaviour witnessed by the speaker and underlying his metaphor or evaluation (*x* is equated with *y* in a particular situation, namely the one displayed by *x*).

### **3.3.3 *un/des N* versus *N* in other constructions**

There are at least two other constructions where *un N* and its plural version *des N* alternate with *N* in French, namely averbal sentences and appositives. A first

relevant observation is that the indefinite is compulsory in *exclamative* averbal sentences, while it is generally optional in *assertive* ones:

- (37) Oh! Une maison avec jardin!      Oh! Des caisses!  
       Oh! A house with garden!        Oh! 'des' boxes!
- (38) #Oh! Maison avec jardin!        #Oh! Caisses!  
       Oh! House with garden!        Oh! Boxes!
- (39) Nous prîmes la rue à gauche. Une maison avec jardin/ Des maisons partout  
       We took the street to the left. A house with garden/'des' houses everywhere
- (40) Nous prîmes la rue à gauche. Maison avec jardin/ Maisons partout  
       We took the street to the left. House with garden/Houses everywhere

*Exclamative* averbal sentences provide exactly the context required by *un N/des N*: they are used to introduce individuals (under a new guise *N*) anchored in a new situation. The acceptability of (37) is thus not surprising, since the job of *un N/des N* is to introduce individuals in such contexts. On the other hand, (38) is out because the bare noun only predicate a property of an individual and thus cannot be used by itself as an individual-introducer.<sup>8</sup>

*Assertive* averbal sentences can also be used to introduce individuals. This is what happens when they are understood as a perception report of an implicit observer describing what he has in front of him, as in (39). But as they do not have a deictic value as exclamatives, assertive averbal sentences can also be used to qualify individuals without introducing them, cf. (40). This pure descriptive use is not felicitous with *un/des N*, as illustrated by the contrast below:

- (41) [written on a box] Lampe(s)  
 (42) [same context] #Une lampe/#Des lampes

Describing the content of a box with *un N/des N* as in (42) triggers a weird discursive effect: what should be a pure description of the box content is oddly presented as a perception report of somebody describing is in front of him. *Appositives* display the same kind of contrast:

- (43) [in a newspaper] Pierre Dargaud, un avocat fiscaliste, déclare avoir vu le suspect prendre l'ascenseur à minuit.  
       Pierre Dargaud, a penal lawyer, declared having seen the suspect taking the elevator at midnight.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that this is in line with the hypothesis of Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, as well as the one of van Geenhoven 1998 and McNally & van Geenhoven 1997 according to which bare indefinites only predicate a property of an individual which is existentially quantified by the verb itself.

- (44) [in a internal report of a company employing P. Dargaud for a long time]  
#Pierre Dargaud, un avocat fiscaliste, prend en charge les prochains dossiers  
liés au projet A. 17.  
Pierre Dargaud, a penal lawyer, takes care of the next dossiers linked to  
the project A. 17

*Un N* is fine in (43) because the indefinite is naturally used as an individual introducer. But this use is inappropriate in a context as (44) where the existence of the individual is already taken for granted by any reader of the report; only its qualification under a certain guise is relevant.

### 3.3.4 *un N* in predicative constructions

Let us see now what are the predictions of the analysis with regard to *être un N* constructions. The first one is that *un N* requires to be acceptable that the indefinite is anchored in a particular situation. Our predictions are the following.

(i) **Anchoring the indefinite.** They are at least five ways to anchor the indefinite, respectively illustrated by the following examples:

- (45) Bonjour, je m'appelle Pierre Dargaud. Je suis un avocat fiscaliste  
Hello, my name is Pierre Dargaud. I'm a penal lawyer  
(46) Mais! Pierre un médecin!  
But Pierre is a doctor!  
(47) Dans cette scène, Pierre est un médecin.  
In this scene, Pierre is a doctor  
(48) Pierre est un assassin  
Pierre is a murderer  
(49) Jean est un avocat qui travaille dans le troisième arrondissement (= (10))  
Jean is a lawyer who works in the 13th urban district

In (45), the situation is provided by the presentational context. In (46) where the construction has its metaphorical reading (it is typically uttered about an addressee which is not a status of doctor), the situation is provided by the doctor-like behaviour of Pierre. Note that in analyzing (46) as meaning *Pierre equates a doctor in a particular situation*, we can account for the fact that there is no entailment from (46) to the proposition Doctor(Pierre). Indeed, there is no entailment from (50a) (our logical form of (46)) to (50b), since there is no entailment between “be a doctor in a particular situation” and “be a doctor”. For an individual *x*:

- (50) a. Pierre(*x*) = *f*(Doctor<sub>in s</sub>)  
b. Pierre(*x*) & Doctor(Pierre)

In (47), the needed situation is provided by the frame-setting modifier (as defined by Maienborn 2001). In (48), the meaning of noun itself provides the required situation: necessarily, being a murderer is being a murderer in a particular situation. Indeed, the ascription of the property denoted by *assassin* is felicitous only in cases where a murder has effectively occurred, i.e. if there is a situation (of murder) that justifies the ascription of the relevant property.

Finally, in (49), the situational anchoring is ensured by the modifiers. If the *un N* version is better with such modifiers, it is because they precisely help to fulfil the situation dependence of the indefinite version<sup>9</sup>.

**(ii) Short-term/long-term properties.** A second good prediction of the analysis is that *un N* will not be felicitous when an adverbial makes clear that the property denoted by *N* is a permanent one, and when no element allows to relativize this property to a situation. For instance, (51) is clearly unacceptable, except if a frame-setting modifier like *sur scène* 'on scene' is implicitly interpreted ((50) then means that I play the role of an computer specialist on scene since 50 years --- but no long-term property is then predicated of me anymore). This constraint is also at play in appositives, cf. (52) (compared to (43)):

- (51) #Je suis un informaticien depuis 50 ans.  
I'm a computer specialist since 50 years.
- (52) #Pierre Dargaud, un avocat pénaliste depuis 30 ans, a déclaré avoir vu le suspect prendre l'ascenseur.  
Pierre Dargaud, a penal lawyer since 30 years, declared having seen the suspect taking the elevator.

A related prediction is that *un* will be compulsory when *N* denotes a short-term property. For instance, (54) is unacceptable, except on the marked reading where being a lawyer passing through Paris is reinterpreted as a permanent property (see also example (32) above):

- (53) Pierre est un avocat de passage à Paris.  
Pierre is a lawyer visiting Paris
- (54) #Pierre est avocat de passage à Paris  
Pierre is Ø lawyer visiting Paris

**(iii) *Ce* constructions.** *Ce* constructions have been largely discussed by Kupferman 1979, Cadiot 1988, Carlier 1996. They work particularly well with *un*

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<sup>9</sup> It can also be that the as what commonly happens elsewhere, the modifiers help the indefinite to get the specific reading, which is the reading needed for the sentence to equate two (specific) individuals. For instance, such modifiers also help the indefinite to get wide scope in an *if*-clause, cf. e.g. Geurts 2005.

*N* in predicative constructions (cf. (55)), and this preference should be accounted for.

- (55) Pierre, c'est un ange.  
Pierre, *ce* is an angel.

All quoted authors note that *ce* tends to “desindividualize” the individual. Carlier suggests that it “dereferentializes” it. Cadiot claims that it “does not exactly refers to its antecedent, but, exactly, to what the speaker does with it. It treats the object not as a 'real thing', individualized, autonomous, but like a support for his own experience” (pp. 177-178, our translation).

One way to capture this effect without giving up the traditional claim that *ce* is a referential expression is to assume that *ce* refers to individuals only as *ingredients of situation*, entities that we could call “thetic individuals”. In other words, the individual referred to is reduced to a simple component of a larger situation.

Let us now see how *ce* distributes with *un N* through the following minimal pairs. Note that the acceptability of (56) incidentally argues against previous accounts like Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, which predict this example as unacceptable, assuming that *ce* perfectly correlates with the indefinite version:

- (56) Pierre, c'est une femme.  
Pierre, 'ce' is a woman  
(57) \*Ces talons aiguilles, c'est une femme.  
These spike heels, 'ce' is a woman.  
(58) \*Pierre, c'est femme.  
Pierre, 'ce' is Ø woman  
(59) Ces talons aiguilles, c'est femme.  
These spike heels, 'ce' is Ø woman

According to the proposed analysis, (56) asserts that an identity between two individuals, the first one being Pierre and referred to by *ce* in the context of utterance and the second one being introduced by *une femme*. As *ce* forces by itself to view the individual as a part of a situation (cf. above), it fulfils the situational requirement imposed by *un N*. The fact that (56) does not require special contexts as before to be acceptable (presentational contexts, justificational ones, metaphorical reading, modifiers etc.) is thus explained, as well as, more generally, the fact that *ce* constructions suit well *un N* in predicative position. The unacceptability of (57) is also easily accounted for, since there is no way to identify a pair of spike heels with a woman.

On the contrary, (59) is accepted since it asserts a permanent property of an aspect of kneels (e.g. their appearance). Finally, (58) is impossible since it is very

difficult to recover the existence of a permanent property of Pierre only conceived as an ingredient of a particular situation.

**(iv) Pronominal subjects.** As already mentioned, *un N* in predicative position is especially bad when the pronouns *il/elle* 'he/she' are in subject position. This is true even in the particular contexts normally increasing the acceptability of *un N*. Quite intriguingly, the other personal pronouns *je* 'I' and *tu* 'you' do not raise this additional problem, and *il/elle* are fine with a post-copular definite description, cf. (62).

- (60) #Il est un avocat  
He is a lawyer
- (61) Je suis/ tu es un avocat  
I am/ you are a lawyer
- (62) Il est l'avocat  
He is the lawyer
- (63) Pierre est un avocat !  
Pierre is a lawyer

As already suggested in section 3.3.1, we propose to account for this distribution in positing that the two NPs of equative sentences must roughly have the same discursive weight. This is straightforwardly the case for paradigmatical equative sentences like *Hesperus is Phosphorus*. Being deictic expressions, *ce*, *je* and *tu* introduce new individuals like indefinites. The constraint is then respected. Being anaphorical expressions, *il/elle* present their referents as known by the hearer. As the indefinite introduces a new individual, the equation cannot go through while respecting the proposed pragmatical rule. But (62) is fine as an equative sentence because it identifies two referents which are known to the hearer. However, definite descriptions arguably *can* also be used to introduce a new individual. Indeed, some authors have independently suggested that the Condition of Familiarity normally attached to definite descriptions can be suspended (cf. e.g. Kleiber 1981:226, Poesio 1994). As they are also able to introduce a new individual, they are thus fine too in subject position with *un N* in post-copular position. Finally, if (63) is fine, it is because proper names can also be used to describe individuals not known to the hearer: it can be that the hearer of (63) only knows the name *Jean*, but not its referent, and proper names are often used in presentational contexts where the individual is introduced to the hearer for the first time (Corblin 2005).

**(v) The distribution of 'personne' (nobody).** As often noticed, 'personne' cannot be used with the indefinite variant (see Roy 2006). Our account straightforwardly explains this by the fact that 'personne' is not referential (see e.g. Tasmowski and Verluyten 1982), and thus cannot provide an entity for the equation to go through.

- (64) a. *Personne n'est avocat*  
Nobody is  $\emptyset$  lawyer  
b. *\*Personne n'est un avocat*  
Nobody is a lawyer

#### 4. Conclusions and remaining problems

In this paper, we have argued that the bare/indefinite alternation in predicative position corresponds to two different kind of sentences: the bare version induces a predication interpretation, whereas the indefinite version triggers an equative one. In delineating more precisely the difference between bare nouns and indefinites *un N*, it contributes to a more fine-grained typology of weak indefinites (since bare nouns and NPs built with a weak determiner are often treated on a par).

Besides introducing equative sentences, our analysis of the indefinite version heavily relies on two requirements, the first being classically attached to indefinites: the Novelty Condition and the anchoring to a situation. The analysis of the bare version, on the other hand, reinterprets in a new light the role of hidden material, already used in de Swart *et al.* 2007.

Some problems remain though. The first one is that traditionally, equative sentences are supposed to allow the permutation of the two NPs (*Dr Smith is Mary* is as fine as *Mary is Dr Smith*). However, this is not the case with sentences of the type “NP est un N”, cf. (65). The only way to recover the full acceptability is to introduce a modal verb like *pouvoir* ‘can’ or *devoir* ‘must’, cf. (66).

- (65) #*Un avocat du troisième arrondissement est Pierre.*  
A lawyer of the third district is Pierre  
(66) *Un avocat du troisième arrondissement peut/doit être Pierre.*  
A lawyer of the third district can/must be Pierre

However, we do not believe that the unacceptability of sentences like (65) completely undermines the equative analysis. It can well be that even if they have the same discursive weight, the two NPs still differ pragmatically in other respects, and that indefinite NPs cannot fulfill the pragmatic properties attached to the subject of equative sentences. These properties remain to be investigated though for the account to be complete.

Another intriguing set of data which could at first sight cast some doubt on the proposed analysis is illustrated by the contrast (67)-(69) below. Note that *avocate* is the feminine version of *avocat*. As shown in (67), it can be used when applied to women, although the masculine version is also commonly used in this case:



- (67) Jeanne est avocate (OK avocat)  
Jeanne is lawyer-FEM. (lawyer-MASC.)  
(68) La profession de Jeanne est avocat.  
The profession of Jeanne is lawyer-MASC.  
(69) #La profession de Pierre est avocate  
The profession of Jeanne is lawyer-FEM.

Why is the feminine version suddenly unavailable when the subject explicitly refers to the trope, if, as we suggest, (68) is a paraphrase of (67)? Interestingly, this contrast only displays with nouns of profession. For instance, with a noun like *adolescent*, the feminine is compulsory with a (feminine) subject overtly denoting a trope, as well as with a subject denoting an individual:

- (70) Jeanne est adolescente (\*adolescent)  
Jeanne is teenager-FEM. (teenager-MASC.)  
(71) L'attitude de Jeanne est adolescente (\*adolescent)  
The attitude of Jeanne is teenager-FEM. (teenager-MASC.)

Our explanation of these facts is the following. Firstly, we assume that the coercion mechanism intervenes *after* the attribution of morphological features. More concretely, *Jeanne* is reinterpreted as *La profession de Jeanne* in (67) only after the morphology feature [+FEM] has been attributed to the bare predicate. This explains why *avocate* is grammatical in (67) (although it is not in (69)). Secondly, we explain the agrammaticality of (69) as follows. The introduction of the feminine version of names of profession in the French lexicon is a relatively new fact. Not so long ago, the masculine version was indifferently applied to men and women. This usage is actually still ongoing, as (67) shows. The proposed idea is that the feminine version of names of professions is too recent to be productive enough to apply to other types of entities than the ones for which they were created, namely persons. In other words, the unacceptability of (69) is a sign that the feminine version of French profession names is not yet part of a fully productive French. On the other hand, the feminine version of names as *adolescent* existing since a very long time, it can apply to any type of entities without any difficulty.

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